

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

February 1999

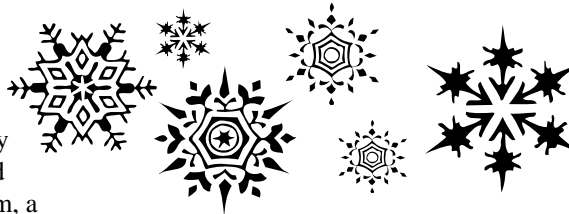
Ice storm hits state during holidays

by Richard Miller
Emergency Services Coordinator
James City County

On December 24, 1998, James City County was hit by a destructive ice storm. Activity began at 4 a.m. with wires down, trees blocking roads, and other calls for service. By 10 a.m., an estimated 95 percent of the county was without electrical service. Before the 24-hour period ended, fire and EMS activity exceeded 150 calls for service, police activity exceeded typical levels by 25 percent and county water and sewer systems were stressed by the weather. By the end of the storm, a significant storm debris problem had manifested itself.

The county faced challenges such as widespread power outages, sheltering needs and returning basic public services to normal. Critical road networks were out of service. Neighboring jurisdictions were

experiencing similar problems and were unable to assist us through our normal mutual aid agreements. Many of our citizens, who relied on electrical power for health reasons, were beginning to contact the EOC for assistance. Virginia Power crews were overwhelmed with the widespread damage and estimated it would be three to four days before power would be restored. People from out of



state were calling the EOC to check on the welfare of friends and family they were unable to reach.

The county activated its emergency plan and declared a Local State of Emergency at 3 p.m. Since our customary shelter was not heated, alternative sheltering was set up at Eastern State Hospital. The shelter was a multi-jurisdictional effort, which was implemented to reduce citizen confusion regarding shelter location. This also helped ease staffing problems over the holidays because the responsibility was shared between jurisdictions.

The Hampton Roads media paging system kept local media apprised of the situation, and the GIS software program made it easy to track storm debris cleanup. Because of the training provided by the Local Emergency Management Operations Course (LEMOC) the previous May, our staff was prepared for this extended operation.

Major observations and issues were identified during assessments after the operation. One such included expanding the call-up list. Due to the holidays, some

of our usual call-up persons or their alternates were difficult to locate in a timely manner.

Additional emergency management training was identified and will be implemented over the next 12 months. For example, communications and public information were not as effective as we had hoped.

We still need better planning to respond to the people in our communities with special needs. Even though we were steadily providing information to our media outlets, many were not sharing this information with the public.

In addition, many areas without power for several days needed an alternative means of receiving information. The GIS program should be expanded to include the electrical grids and transformer stations to better track electrical restoration. Alternative sheltering for the families of EOC staff would be valuable.

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Date change!

The date has been changed for Tornado Preparedness Day. Because schools are holding statewide testing on March 9, the day originally scheduled for this public awareness campaign, the event is now being planned for March 23.

Students and school staff are two of the most important audiences that need to be targeted with this vital preparedness information. The date change helps ensure these groups will be able to participate.

If you have questions, please call Janet Clements at 804/897-6510.

Inside

This edition of "Update" has been expanded to include an extra page of stories and news items.

As a reminder: If you would like to submit an article, please contact the Managing Editor, Jo Hoots, at 804/897-6511, e-mail jhoots.des@state.va.us

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Virginia conference to feature national experts on severe weather issues

Have you ever directed less than courteous thoughts to your local weather person because his or her predictions were about as accurate as those of a phone-line psychic? Have you often wondered why the media seems to offer weather "entertainment" instead of weather facts?

In reality, weather is a multifaceted, complex topic, and next month, you have the opportunity to immerse yourself in workshops dealing with just about every aspect of it. From March 17-19, Williamsburg hosts the premiere 1999 Virginia Emergency Management Conference which focuses this

year on severe weather and related topics.

"This 'homegrown' conference addresses a multitude of important issues and concerns involving emergency management in Virginia," said VDES State Coordinator, Michael Cline. "We not only have the opportunity to showcase the Commonwealth's emergency services community, but our intent is for this conference to be the first in a series which will contribute significantly to the continued growth of professionalism in our field."

Bill Sammler, NWS Warning Coordination Meteorologist and conference speaker, said, "We'll have something for everyone. Historical

weather and climate will be discussed, as well as some aspects of weather forecasting. In addition, there will be a focus on preparedness for and actions needed before, during and AFTER weather disasters. We'll even talk about the psychological aspects of disasters on people, especially disaster victims. When people leave the conference, we think it'll be hard for them to find topics we DID NOT discuss."

A range and breadth of workshops cover everything from insurance issues to military resources for recovery and more. The Weather Channel's Dennis Smith explores the weather as both science and entertainment;

Mike Armstrong from FEMA addresses mitigation issues in relation to minimizing the impact of severe weather, and Virginia Climatologist Pat Michaels talks about weather in the Commonwealth.

One of the best features is the evening round-table discussions, during which you'll interact with the speaker of the day as well as with your peers. Start a tradition by making sure your spring plans include three days of insightful professional development.

For information, call Commonwealth Conventions at 757/491-2800, e-mail comcon@erols.com or visit the VDES Web site at www.vdes.state.va.us

Ice Storm

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Continued training and coordination with our retirement centers, to encourage them to formulate and implement facility emergency plans, is needed.

One of our successes included an effective debris management program that was developed and implemented, providing for reasonable disposal of storm debris. While the county had identified a need for a comprehensive debris management plan for hurricanes, this one was formulated over the several days following the ice storm. The plan addressed communications, staffing, resource needs and disposal contracts for debris.

Finally, our plan to move to an ESF format for our emergency operations plan will be helpful in managing our response to diverse needs within our communities in a quick and efficient manner. Our planned computer improvements to the EOC will prove to be valuable in the future and will improve the flow of information from one emergency service function to another.

This event tested our emergency

operations plan. We determined the plan can be implemented quickly during a community-wide disaster, but does need some adjustments to address response gaps.

Continued improvement on public information needs to be developed. Additional staff training and performance

objectives were identified that will be addressed over the next 12 months.

While no one appreciates an emergency when it occurs, we can truly learn a lot during trials by fire or ice, as it may be.

(For information, call Richard Miller at 757/220-0626, e-mail rmiller@james-city.va.us)

Seventh annual training institute covers disaster response skills

You are cordially invited to expand your mind, sharpen your skills and network with the finest in emergency services. Join the American Red Cross at their seventh annual 1999 Virginia Training Institute this February 24-March 4 at the Fort Magruder Inn and Conference Center in Williamsburg.

This year, the Institute targets anyone and everyone who is involved in disaster response and planning. The nine-day event features a series of workshops on topics that include community disaster education, damage assessment, special needs sheltering, community planning for pets, aircraft disaster planning, frontline leadership principles and more. You'll want to attend whether you're in fire services, EMS, emergency management or you simply want to broaden your skills base.

Pick and choose the days you wish to attend. The course enrollment fee is \$20 per day. However, limited scholarship assistance is available for Virginia and District of Columbia registrants. Call to find out about registration deadlines.

For information or to receive the Institute catalog of courses for this event, call Kenny Updike at 804/780-2268, e-mail updikek@usa.redcross.org

HAZ MAT

Training improves delivery of services

by Ron Hargrave

Technological Hazards Division Training Officer

One of the most challenging and time consuming activities faced by any training officer involves course development. With the never-ending evolution of regulations, standards, trends, etc., training is in a constant state of flux. To make sure we are meeting your needs, the Technological Hazards Division Training Branch is seeking your input in a number of areas.

The division is currently developing a new course for the hazmat branch officer and the hazmat safety officer. We envision this course as eventually being integrated into our "Specialist" course series.

The initial target audiences are those serving as Hazmat Regional Team Leaders and Team Leader assistants. Development is not complete, but the course will probably be about 40 hours, with major emphasis placed on risk assessment. Topics will deal with defining the term, describing the risk assessment process and outlining how the results are implemented. The balance of the course will concentrate on branch officer and safety officer functions. The final day will be scenario-based, wherein course participants work through a variety of incidents.

The program design will allow for flexibility in the delivery of the course. For example, it can be taught as a continuous one-week class or offered in a modular format. In this version, the Branch and Safety Officer functions are taught as separate modules. Each of these modules would contain the risk assessment portion and the scenario exercises.

We intend to present the highlights of the course for your input and review during the March Hazmat Team Leaders Meeting. In addition, we are currently working on a complete revision of the "Hazardous Materials First Responder — Awareness" course, which is slated for completion later this year.

This course has been in existence for several years and replaced the original "Level-1" course. What it teaches is key to effective hazmat response throughout the Commonwealth. The skills it imparts are our primary defense in a hazmat incident. It helps us recognize potential hazards and enables us to implement the basic steps needed for an effective and safe response.

The Awareness course is intended for everyone in the public safety arena, and for those who are not in public safety but who may discover and report a potential hazmat incident. It is our responsibility to ensure that everyone in a large audience receives the most current and up-to-date training we can provide. We take this responsibility very seriously and will continuously strive to offer the latest information.

Our course development procedures involve input from those of you who use the instructional product as well as those with
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extensive field experience. We feel this process ensures acceptance from most participants and offers training experiences that will be useful to responders.

If you are interested in assisting with the development of courses and course material — and are willing to contribute your time and effort —

please send us a brief letter outlining your areas of expertise, qualifications, course development background and other pertinent information. Send to the VDES Technological Hazards Division at 10501 Trade Court, Richmond, Virginia, 23236, e-mail rhargrave.des@state.va.us for more information.

Mark your calendars now

**Statewide Incident Management Committee
Third Biennial Workshop
August 15-18
Williamsburg**

Make room now on your calendar to attend this workshop. If you want the nuts and bolts regarding the most efficient way to clear up a highway incident, you'll appreciate the theme this year: "Reducing Clearance Time."

Danville hosts SARA Title III EPCRA workshop

The Danville LEPC, VDES and the EPA are sponsoring a one-day workshop on SARA Title III, otherwise known as the Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act (EPCRA). Topics include reporting requirements under Emergency Planning, Emergency Notification, Hazardous Chemical Inventory Reporting and Toxic Chemical Release Inventory Reporting. Find out everything you wanted to know about EPCRA but were afraid to ask by attending this interactive workshop. Thoughtful discussion and relevant questions are the themes of the day.

For questions about this free workshop or to register, call George Roarty at 804/897-6574.

Sites of Interest

The "Virginia Governor Jim Gilmore" Web site reflects both an activist approach to government and a commitment to the intelligent use of technology. To stay informed about state-level events that may affect public safety and local government, visit <http://dit1.state.va.us/governor/>

A profusion of relevant links inform, update and educate.

The Texas A&M Agricultural Extension Web site offers a thorough selection of emergency preparedness information. As well as providing an online version of the guide, *Extension Agent's Handbook for Emergency Preparedness and Response*, the site contains separate sections dealing with various severe weather hazards. Each section offers extensive background information and safety guidelines. Visit <http://archnt2.tamu.edu/dbilbo/Taex%20Emergency/TAEXtop.htm>

Roanoke Valley kicks off Project Impact campaign

by Carol Wright

Roanoke City Emergency Services Office

The Roanoke Valley, including the city of Roanoke, Roanoke County, Salem and the town of Vinton, was the first community in Virginia chosen to participate in FEMA's "Project Impact."



This prestigious program challenges communities to take preventive measures that reduce the effects of natural disasters through public and private partnerships.

In 1998, Roanoke Valley received a \$500,000 grant to assess needs and implement mitigation programs throughout the Valley. Five separate work groups are reviewing issues as they pertain to storm water management, land use, hazard analysis, public information/education and partnership resource development. Programs will be offered to inform and educate the community about these hazards and how to effectively reduce risk.

The goal is to implement risk reduction activities into daily decision making. "We realize that we can reduce the impact of disasters and ensure the Valley's economic stability following a disaster if more emphasis is placed on preventive measures," said Bob Herbert, City Manager and Director of Emergency Services for the city of Roanoke.

Since the flood of 1985, more than \$15 million has been spent in storm water management improvements in the city of Roanoke. Roanoke County has been in the community rating system since 1989 and the city of Roanoke has been in this program since 1996.

The first post-disaster hazard mitigation grant project in FEMA Region III was for a buyout program in the Garden City area

of Roanoke City. Thirty-one homes have already been purchased. In the town of Vinton, FEMA Grants and Community Development Block Grants have provided for acquisition and relocation services for families in the Midway community. In addition to Project Impact funding, the city of Roanoke and Roanoke County

have each received approval for \$750,000 projects under the hazard mitigation grant program for purchase and removal of additional flood-prone homes.

"The Roanoke Valley has taken significant steps already in forming strong partnerships with the business community and

identifying actions to make their community disaster-resistant," said FEMA Region III Director Rita Calvan. "I believe it will become a national model for Project Impact."

A signing ceremony was held on December 15, 1998, to formally signify partnerships with the business community and the state and federal government. Forty businesses have already become partners. A Project Impact billboard was signed by the partners and will be placed in strategic locations throughout the Roanoke Valley. Roanoke County Administrator Elmer Hodge said, "The Roanoke Valley has a long history of working together in crisis situations. Project Impact involves the business community and citizens in preparedness efforts against flooding, ice storms and other natural disasters."

Activities being scheduled in early 1999 include a community forum to allow business and community leaders to express ideas and concerns, a series of "free seminars" to help businesses prepare contingency plans, as well as numerous community education programs.

Wanda Reed, Coordinator of Emergency Services for the city of Roanoke said, "While we realize the focus of Project Impact is to address how to mitigate the impact of natural disasters, we in the Roanoke Valley realize that we are greatly impacted by day-to-day

emergencies. Our intent is to maximize Project Impact by developing unusual and creative commitments throughout the Roanoke Valley to address a broad range of emergency and disaster issues. We will try to find a 'creative' role for all businesses, agencies and citizens so that everyone can participate in this important project."

The Roanoke Valley is taking action against disasters! Government, business and other community leaders are working together to create a safe environment in which to live and work. For information, call Wanda Reed at 540/853-2425, e-mail emerserv@ci.roanoke.va.us

Virginia Beach is selected as "Project Impact" Community

At a Project Impact Summit this December in Washington, D.C., Virginia Beach became the second locality in the Commonwealth to be declared a Project Impact Community. Future issues of Update will follow the progress of the Virginia Beach campaign.

IAEM newsletter is Y2K Resource

With a special focus on Y2K issues, the January newsletter from the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) is available both on the Internet and as hard copy (a limited amount is being reprinted). This issue includes hands-on articles by emergency managers who share their experiences with Y2K, various approaches to planning, public information — including an American Red Cross preparedness checklist — an article from FEMA that explains FEMA's role, its related programs and resources it can provide and much, much more.

To order extra copies at \$2.50 each, e-mail iaem@aol.com or call 703/538-1795. Visit the IAEM Web site at www.iaem.com to download this issue.

Murphy visits Wythe County over New Year

by Todd Branscome
Wythe County
Emergency Services Coordinator

The 1999 New Year's holiday will be long remembered in Wythe County. While most people were thinking of resolutions to make, we experienced a series of events which proved to be a true test of our resolve.

It started with a winter storm that was forecast to bring sleet and freezing rain throughout the holiday weekend. The sleet began early Saturday morning on January 2. By evening, several inches of sleet were on the ground. As night fell, the sleet turned to freezing rain.

On Sunday at about 1:40 a.m., I was awakened by the dispatcher who told me the power was out and the emergency generator had not activated. This was the start of a series of events which led to the catastrophic failure of several critical systems. In three hours' time, the county lost the E-911 dispatch center and EOC, a natural gas gate station exploded, the fire department communications system failed, and the CAD system crashed. Because of the gas explosion, between 1500-1600 customers in Wytheville were without power.

With a heavy covering of ice and sleet on the roadways hampering emergency response, our first response was to activate the emergency generator. We restored emergency power in under 30 minutes which brought up the dispatch consoles and communications systems. Our computer technician brought the CAD system back online. Once the EOC was in operation, I went to the scene of the explosion.

When I arrived, flames were shooting over 100 feet in the air and a fire had encompassed the entire gate station. The fire's glow could be seen over five miles away and it appeared as if the sun was coming up in the western sky. The diameter of the fire was over 30 feet and the heat was estimated at 2,000 to 3,000 degrees. We lost a business and a residence from the fire's heat. Water used to extinguish the fire seemed to evaporate

before it could cool the structures.

When the fire was finally extinguished at six that Sunday morning, the initial damage assessment indicated that gas could be restored to other jurisdictions but not to Wytheville. The gas company thought it might be two or three days before gas service could be restored. However, they fixed the problem in less time than originally anticipated by running a temporary gas line which restored power to most people in about 19 hours.

Later that same morning, the sheriff notified us the jail had no heat because the boiler had cracked. This crisis was temporarily resolved by evacuating the

For example, you can't take an E911 system offline during a drill to test what would happen. In the event of a real emergency, you need to have second- and third-level plans for restoring power to your E911 system. When our emergency generator failed, our secondary plan tasks the fire department with supplying a portable generator. This worked fine until the gas gate station exploded and our firefighters had to take the generator to the fire scene. Because of this experience, our future drills will encompass catastrophic failure of all systems at the same time.

Communications

Wythe County was in the process of building a new fire and rescue communications system. This new system has backup antennas and sites in the event that one site goes down. The new system is now nearly complete, with each fire and rescue agency having access to two dispatch sites. Should one fail, the dispatcher can switch to the next site.

The budget also includes funding to outfit my response truck as a backup dispatch center with the ability to set pagers and talk with all agencies in the county.

Power systems

To remedy any future issues with power shortages and related backup systems, we have conducted a power study of every critical component in the EOC and dispatch center. We are in the process of researching systems to bid on that can run for at least 30 minutes under load.

Throughout this incident, assistance was offered by many surrounding jurisdictions which not only offered manpower and equipment but offered to transport it to us. That kind of support is invaluable.

Finally, training and knowledgeable people are the key to any successful incident response. I am fortunate to have had both in the personnel who staff my EOC.

(For information, call Todd Branscome at 540/223-6012, e-mail branscome@naxs.com)



inmates to nearby jurisdictions until the boiler could be fixed. We thought this was the end of our emergencies, but we were wrong.

Monday morning, I received a call that the pressure had dropped on the temporary gas line and gas was again out to the town.

To fix this problem, the gas companies ran a second bypass line, and by the next day, the problem was mostly resolved.

Lessons Learned

Out of the ongoing series of crises we dealt with, one lesson stands out: **If you are not planning for the catastrophic failure of all critical systems at the same instance you'll be in for a shock if it ever happens.**

When so many systems fail, your emergency plan is really put to the test.

Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Emergency Action Planning for Dams

February 18
Lynchburg
March 4
Stuart

Decision Making and Problem Solving

February 18
Culpeper

Coordinator's Briefing

February 24-25
Virginia Beach

Principles of Emergency Management

March 2-4
Culpeper

Community Relations Outreach

March 3
Richmond

Leadership and Influence

March 9-11
James City County

Developing Volunteer Resources

March 24-25
Harrisonburg

Disaster-Related Needs of Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

March 30
Roanoke

Rapid Assessment Planning Workshop

March 31-April 1
Culpeper

Hazardous Weather and Flooding Preparedness

April 13-15
Abingdon

Media Relations Workshop

April 16
Manassas

Disaster Response and Recovery Operations

April 20-22
Roanoke
For information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/897-6557

Reservist Training

Reservist Program Orientation

February 17
Richmond

VEOC Tabletop Exercise I

March 4
Richmond

State Emergency Response Team Exercise

March 23
Richmond
For information, call Lin Saylor at 804/897-6552

Technological Hazards

Hazardous Materials Technician

April 5-16
Ashland

Advanced Hazardous Materials Control

May 10-14
Ashland

SHMERAC Training Committee Meeting

March 9
Richmond

Chemistry of Hazardous Materials

March 8-19
Virginia Beach

HAZMAT Team Leaders Meeting

March 30-April 1
Roanoke
For information, call Ron Hargrave at 804/897-6573

Search and Rescue

Managing Search Operations

Part I: March 20-21
Part II: April 16-18
Charlottesville

SAR Council

April 24
Richmond
For information, call Winnie Pennington at 804/674-2422

Conferences

Virginia Emergency Management Conference

March 17-19
Williamsburg
For information, call 757/491-2800

National Hurricane Conference

March 29-April 2
Orlando
For information, call 850/906-9224

1999 Video and Publications Catalog available

Get your updated copy of the VDES Video and Publications catalog to see what we have in stock this year. Let your civic and church groups know about the disaster preparedness items they can check out from VDES and order extra copies for these groups. You can distribute this resource at your next special event.

If you would like us to include a particularly good video or brochure in next year's catalog, call 804/897-6510 with your suggestions or to order your copies.



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